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THE REFORM  
IN  
GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

IN OUR AMERICAN SCHOOLS,

WITH A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE EMINENT LABORS

OF

PROF. ARNOLD GUYOT,

IN CONNECTION THEREWITH.

BY

WM. F. PHELPS, A. M.,

PRESIDENT OF FIRST STATE NORMAL SCHOOL OF MINNESOTA.



CHICAGO:  
HADLEY BROTHERS.

1871.

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## IN

### GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES.

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In no branch of instruction has there been a more radical or decided improvement among our American schools, during the last twenty years, than in that of Geography. And it may truthfully be added, that in none was there a more urgent need of improvement, in respect both to the subject matter and the mode of teaching. Fortunately for this strong assertion, it requires no argument to prove it; for, these changes are so recent that there are thousands of intelligent teachers throughout the country whose observation and experience will amply attest its truth. If there be any who are inclined to doubt, the materials for investigating the question are abundant and near at hand. Let any such person take up a copy of the earlier editions of any of the current series of geographies published even ten or fifteen years ago, or let him examine the "Outline Maps" of the same period, and compare them with those works which are now found in our schools of the better class, and the evidence of the improvement referred to will be conclusive. No honest mind can gain-

say it. The *fact* forms a proud page in the history of American education.

Within the past twenty years the study of Geography has undergone a revolution that is little less than remarkable. From a dry catechism of puerile and disjointed facts, it has been planted upon the solid foundation of *Exact Science*. In the place of a multitude of superficial details and detached fragments concerning the natural and political divisions of the earth, with no basis of philosophical association, we now have the *Science of the Globe*. The children in our schools can turn to the *study of the earth as an organism*, as the theatre of human societies adapted, by the provision of an All-Wise Providence, to the wants of man while working out that problem of development and progress for which he was created. Instead of a burdensome and profitless effort of arbitrary memory, it has become a rational gymnastic to almost every faculty of the mind. It invigorates and strengthens the expanding intellect. It stimulates the emotional nature, leading the student to reverence that Infinite Intelligence who, through the long ages of the past, has so wisely planned for the well-being and happiness of His creatures in the formation and decoration of their earthly abode.

Now, it is but just to inquire what is the origin of this great revolution? The history is brief and simple, and it is due to the character and services of one who is too modest to speak of himself that the story should be told. It has been my good fortune to

be conversant with the facts, as well as to be intimately acquainted, through association in common labors, with the eminent man to whom the friends of American education owe a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid.

We think it was some time in the latter part of the year 1848, that Professor ARNOLD GUYOT of the University Neuchâtel in Switzerland, became a resident of the United States. The companion and friend of Humboldt and Ritter, he brought with him the rich treasures of their profound learning, superadded to the results of his own extensive, original researches as a Geographer and Scientist. As yet unacquainted with the English Language, Prof. Guyot, in January, 1849, began a Course of Lectures in French at the Lowell Institute in Boston, to a select and highly intelligent audience, on "Comparative Physical Geography in its Relation to the History of Mankind." So deeply interesting and impressive were the lectures that their publication was at once demanded. Translated by the late President Felton, of Harvard, they first appeared in the *Boston Daily Traveler*, having been written out from the notes used by the lecturer on the preceding evening. Their publication in the English language created a still deeper interest in the fresh and original views of Prof. Guyot, and in the spring of 1849 they were published in the form of a volume of over 300 pages, by Messrs. Gould & Lincoln, of Boston. This volume is entitled "Earth and Man," and up to 1870, sixteen thousand

copies had been published,—a very small number when the extreme interest and value of the book are considered. We shall never forget the new inspiration which the perusal of this volume, soon after its appearance, gave us. And we distinctly remember the notes of dissatisfaction with the current geographical teaching which began to be sounded soon after the publication of “Earth and Man.” These were the key notes of the grand revolution which has followed and to which we have already referred.

The new interest awakened by these labors of Prof. Guyot soon led to his engagement as a lecturer in the Massachusetts Institutes and in the Normal schools of that State, where he continued his efforts for several years. While thus engaged, he was earnestly besought to prepare a series of maps and text books embodying his views, and which should make it possible to teach Geography according to his own comprehensive definition as : “*The physical science of the Globe, or the science of the general phenomena of the present life of the globe, in reference to their connection and their mutual dependence.*”

One or two fine mural maps were at length published, and we believe are still extant. But the completion of a series on a plan so comprehensive involved a very heavy expenditure, and the publishers, the Boston house before referred to, were unwilling at that early day to incur the risk, and the work was stopped.

In the mean time, Professor Guyot was appointed to



the chair of Geology and Physical Geography in the College of New Jersey, at Princeton. This was in the year 1855. The Normal School of that State having been established during the same year, he was also appointed lecturer upon these subjects in that institution, and was authorized to provide all necessary charts and drawings for the illustration of his admirable courses. It was during this pleasant association of some four years that we learned to admire the life and character of this noble man, no less than to appreciate the priceless value of his labors to elevate the standard of education in the country of his adoption. It is thus easy to see how his association with teachers and educators in New England and the Middle States, his lectures before Institutes, Normal schools, Colleges, and learned societies, should create a demand for a far higher order of educational appliances in his favorite field, than any heretofore existing. With the growth of such ennobling views of the earth in its relations to man, it could not be otherwise than that the dissatisfaction with the current books, maps and methods of instruction should become daily more deep and intense. So evident had the desire for better means of instruction become, that at length, in the year 1862, the eminent publishing house of Messrs. Charles Scribner & Co., were led to effect an arrangement with Professor Guyot by which the schools of this country are now in the enjoyment of aids to instruction in this department, probably surpassed by those of no other nation on the



globe. To those who, unbiassed by prejudice or self-interest, are able to review the history of this movement from its beginning, in 1849, the change is truly wonderful. When canvassing these plans with my friend, more than fifteen years ago, I scarcely dared hope to live to see what now my eyes do see, and I believe that in no other country would such changes have been possible.

I have thus indicated, in a very brief and imperfect way, what results have been directly effected by the labors of this eminent scholar and author. He has revolutionized the sentiment of our country as to the true character and scope of geographical instruction. He has changed the entire character of that instruction. He has given us a series of text books, and several series of maps, unequalled in this country and unsurpassed in any other. He is the pioneer, the inspirer and the Nestor in this great reform.

But this is not all. He has aroused from their slumbers a host of copyists and imitators. He has compelled many revisions and improvements in previously existing series, until now, we venture to affirm, that were some of the *original* authors of several geographical works to arise from their graves they would scarcely know the series which bear their names. If Professor Guyot had done no more than to compel this improvement in pre-existing works, he would be entitled to the gratitude of the whole country. But aside from this, his successful efforts to raise the standard of education in the

direction indicated, and his preparation of the unrivalled series of maps and text books now so widely and justly popular, throughout the country, leave him without a peer among the authors of school aids in this department of study.

In conclusion, I may be allowed to say, that I have written these words without the knowledge of Prof. Guyot or of his publishers, simply because I know and feel that they embody the "truth of history" and render to this distinguished man only that which is his due. In giving expression to these sentiments I do not wish to be understood as depreciating the honest labors of others in this department. I would give full credit for all successful achievement in the effort to improve the instrumentalities for general education, by whomsoever effected, even under the keen spur of competition and self-interest. And knowing, as I do, the noble and unselfish spirit of Prof. Guyot, I do not hesitate to affirm that no one rejoices more sincerely than he at every advantage gained, and by whomsoever gained, in behalf of a more rational and comprehensive system of education for the youth of the country. With him there is no rivalry except in good works, and in these every honest man, knowing the facts, must concede that he has greatly abounded.

WINONA, MINN., May 20, 1871.

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